The Importance of the Sunnah and the Danger of It's Opposite (Bid'ah)

by: Ali Camarata

All thanks and praise is due to Allah, we seek His help and forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and the consequences of our evil deeds. Whoever Allah guides will never be led astray, and whoever Allah leads astray will never find guidance. I bear witness there is no god but Allah, alone without any partners, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger. Allah says:

And whoever desires other than Islam as their religion - never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers.¹

O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely [and perfectly] and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.²

[Iblees] said, "My Lord, because You have put me in error, I will surely make [disobedience] attractive to them on earth, and I will mislead them all - Except Your chosen, (guided) slaves among them.³

Allah warns us that Shaytan is our clear and open enemy. As our enemy Shaytan never stops looking for our weaknesses and ways to mislead us. Shaytan wishes to mislead all of mankind except those who find true guidance. No one intentionally follows misguidance, yet this is the goal of Shaytan for us. One of the best ways to destroy Islam and mislead us is to make misguidance appear attractive to us.

The defense against being misled is entering Islam completely. This is done by obeying the laws of Allah and His Messenger (ما عليه وسلم) while avoiding the path Shaytan tempts us with. Shaytan will tempt us towards bid'ah (innovation) believing it to be good, while every bid'ah (innovation) is misguidance.

The Prophet (عليه الله) used to begin his weekly sermons with what is known as Khutbat al-Hajjah. The ending of this introduction, which the Prophet (عليه وسلم) repeated at least once a week to a gathering of companions or more often, is:

Verily, the most truthful speech is the Book of Allah, the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad, and the worst affairs are newly invented matters. Every newly invented matter is a religious innovation, and every religious innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance is in the Hellfire.⁴

Know that this life is a constant struggle. A struggle both to obey Allah and combat Shaytan. It is a

¹ Surat 'Ali 'Imran, 3:85

² Surat al-Bagarah, 2:208

³ Surat al-Hijr, 15:39-40

⁴ Agreed upon, also see the book "Khutbat-ul-Haajah" by Al-Albani

struggle that requires vigilance until the moment our souls are taken from our body. We remain vigilant through the principle of ilm and amal, knowledge and action. We constantly seek knowledge and we strive to implement it in our lives. It is only through knowledge that true worship of Allah can be achieved. Without knowledge we can be tempted to evil while we think it to be something good. We could spend our whole life worshipping Allah only to go astray at the final moments before death. Allah says:

O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared and do not die except as Muslims [in submission to Him].⁵

The purpose of this book is to oppose Shaytan and his helpers through reviving the Sunnah. We must observe the reality that Shaytan is a knowledgeable and patient enemy, which increases his danger. The greatest tool to harm the Muslims is the loss of the Sunnah and the introduction of bid'ah. While the greatest weapon against the Shaytan is the revival of the Sunnah. This is why one of the most rewarding actions we can do is reviving the Sunnah. The Prophet (ميلولله) said:

"Whoever revives a Sunnah of mine, which people then act upon, will have a reward equivalent to that of those who act upon it, without that detracting from their reward in the slightest. And whoever introduces a bid'ah (innovation) that is acted upon, will have a burden of sins equivalent to that of those who act upon it, without that detracting from the burden of those who act upon it in the slightest."

Allah, the Most High, is both the Creator of mankind and all that exists as well as the One who revealed and perfected our religion, thus making the two perfectly compatible for each other. The Quran was not sent down as a published book with an angel just to be handed to mankind. Indeed, Allah looked to the hearts of all mankind and chose the best of creation as the final Prophet (all mankind and chose the Quran. The Prophet (all mankind and chose the best of creation as the final Prophet (all mankind and chose the Prophet (all mankind and chose the best of creation as the final Prophet (all mankind and chose the Prophet (all mankind and chose the best of creation as the final Prophet (all mankind and chose the Prophet (all mankind and chose the best of creation as the final Prophet (all mankind and chose the Prophet (all mankind and chose the best of creation as the final Prophet (all mankind and chose the Best of creation as the final Prophet (all mankind and chose the Prophet (all mankind and chose the best of creation as the final Prophet (all mankind and chose the Prophet (all mankind and chose the Best of creation as the final Prophet (all mankind and chose the Prophet (all mankind and chose the Best of creation as the final Prophet (all mankind and chose the Quran but also the Hikmah given to the Prophet (all mankind and chose the Best of creation as the final Prophet (all mankind and chose the Quran but also the Hikmah given to the Prophet (all mankind and chose the Quran but also the Hikmah given to the Prophet (all mankind and chose the Quran but also the Hikmah given to the Prophet (all mankind and chose the Quran but also the Hikmah given to the Prophet (all mankind and chose the Quran but also the Hikmah given to the Prophet (all mankind and chose the Quran but also the Hikmah given to the Prophet (all mankind and chose the Quran but also the Hikmah given to the Prophet (all mankind and chose the Quran but also the Hikmah given to the Prophet (all mankind and chose the Quran but also the Hikmah gi

And do not take the verses of Allah in jest. And remember the favor of Allah upon you (Islam) and that which He has sent down to you of the Book (Quran) and al-Hikmah (Sunnah) by which He instructs you. And fear Allah and know that Allah is Knowing of all things.⁷

And if it was not for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy, a group of them

⁵ Surat 'Ali 'Imran, 3:102

⁶ Ibn Majah 1/209, authenticated by al-Albani

⁷ Surat al-Baqarah, 2:231

would have determined to mislead you. But they do not mislead except themselves, and they will not harm you at all. And Allah has revealed to you the Book (Quran) and al-Hikmah (Sunnah) and has taught you that which you did not know. And ever has the favor of Allah upon you been great.⁸

It is upon us to follow the Quran and Sunnah as it was understood and practiced by the Companions, and those who followed them afterwards – our pious predecessors (Salaf us-Salih). As Allah says:

And the first to embrace Islam of the Muhajirun and the Ansaar (the two groups comprising the Companions) and also those who followed them exactly (in faith)! Allah is well-pleased with them as they are well-pleased with Him. He has prepared for them Gardens under which rivers flow (Paradise) to dwell therein forever. That is the supreme success.

You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah.¹⁰

The Prophet (صلى الله) said:

"The best people are those living in my generation, and then those who will follow them, and then those who will follow the latter."

Allah describes the Companions as the best generation of all of mankind, and informs us why. They were examples of enjoining what was right and forbidding what was evil. When people started visiting the tree at the site of the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah, Umar ibn al-Khattab removed it to prevent people from making it a place of visitation or worship which was not sanctioned in Islam. We see this attitude from the Companions and those who followed them exactly (ie. the scholars, or the pious predecessors).

Ibn Abbas said: "By Allah, I do not believe there is anyone on earth today whom the Devil would like to see dead more than me... By Allah, when the Devil makes a bid (innovation) in the West or the East and a man carries it to me I counter it with a sunnah and it returns to him as he sent it." ¹²

⁸ Surat an-Nisa', 4:113

⁹ Surat at-Tawbah, 9:100

¹⁰ Surat 'Ali 'Imran, 3:110

¹¹ Bukhari 52/16, 62/3, 81/18; Muslim 44/301; Tirmidhi 7/2221, 9/2302-2303, 46/3859

¹² Talbis Iblis by Imam ibn al-Jawzi

What we notice is that the more the Ummah forgot the Sunnah, added into the religion bid'ah and allowed the Shaytan to deceive us the further away we drifted from pure Islam. For us to attempt to be like them we must start enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. Know that our religion is a religion of evidence. We are warned about speaking without knowledge by Allah, for this is the cause of bid'ah and misguidance. Allah says:

Say: "The things that my Lord has indeed forbidden are immoralities and sin, oppression without right, that you associate with Allah that for which He has not sent down authority, and that you say about Allah that which you do not know."

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The Shaytan and his helpers call people away from Islam and the Sunnah and to misguidance and the Hellfire.

The Prophet (ميارياليه) drew a straight line with his hand and said: "This is the straight path of Allah." Then on its left and on its right he drew other lines and he said: "These paths all have Shayateen calling people to them." Then he recited, "And verily, this is my Straight Path, so follow it, and follow not (other) paths, for they will separate you away from His Path. This He instructed you that you may become righteous." 15

The Prophet ($\frac{\omega_{L}}{\omega_{L}}$) predicted that many people would follow these paths overtime splitting into sects.

"Surely the Jews split into 72 sects and my nation will split into 73 sects, all of which will be in the fire except one... The one which is upon why my companions and myself are upon." 16

The Prophet (مطواله) also described a people who would completely abandon the Sunnah and hadith altogether.

"Indeed! Soon a hadith of mine will be related to a man, while he is reclining on his couch, who will say, 'The Book of Allah (Quran) is enough between you and us. Whatever we find in it as halal we accept as halal, and whatever we find in it as haram we accept as haram.' Behold, whatever Allah's Messenger has declared as haram is just like that which Allah has declared haram."

We also see those who pick and choose from the religion, taking whatever agrees with their desires or they attempt to change the religion to fit their agenda. Islam is the Quran and Sunnah as it was practiced and understood by the Companions - any attempt to add, remove or change Islam is a rejection of what

¹⁴ Ahmad; Nasa'i; Hakim

¹³ Surat al-A'raf, 7:33

¹⁵ Surat al-An'am, 6:153

¹⁶ Tirmidhi 40/36, authenticated by al-Albani

¹⁷ Tirmidhi 41/20

Allah and His Messenger (عليه الله) have given to us. The Prophet (عليه وسلم) said:

"So whoever turns away from my Sunnah does not belong to me."18

The Prophet (مالي) predicted that after his death people would move away from true Islam. Turning away from the Sunnah is the path to destruction while turning to it and clinging to it is the path to salvation.

"Verily he among you who lives long will see great controversy, so you must keep to my Sunnah and to the Sunnah of the the rightly guided caliphs. Cling to it stubbornly [literally: with your molar teeth]. Beware of newly invented matters [in the religion], for verily every bid'ah (innovation) is misguidance." 19

As we mentioned before Shaytan is a knowledgeable and patient enemy, he will eliminate a single Sunnah and replace it with a bid'ah (innovation), and then over time eliminating the Sunnah more and more, knowing that this is the path to destroying Islam and misguiding men. The Prophet (مُسِالِهُ said:

"I am your predecessor at the Lake-Fount (al-Kauthar) and some men amongst you will be brought to me, and when I will try to hand them some water, they will be pulled away from me by force whereupon I will say, 'O Lord, my companions!' Then the Almighty will say, 'You do not know what they did after you left, they introduced new things into the religion after you.'" Then I will say, 'Far removed (from mercy), far removed (from mercy), those who changed (the religion) after me!" "20"

"Whoever innovates something in this matter of ours (Islam) that is not part of it, will have it rejected."²¹

Everything done as worship, attached to acts of worship or done intending the pleasure Allah is forbidden, except what Allah has allowed by clear evidence in the Quran and Sunnah – this is the essence of Bid'ah (innovations) and what will be completely rejected by Allah.

In the final year of the Prophet's (مطواله) life he chose the most public of locations and times, which included over 120,000 men and women from various tribes and regions both near and far, to deliver an important final reminder to us before leaving this world. The Prophet (ما يعملونه) gave an important speech which has become well known as the Farewell Sermon during the gathering of which is also known as Farewell Pilgrimage (Hajj) which includes many lessons for us to take. The following are two quotes from the speech that apply to our topic.

"Beware of Satan, for the safety of your religion. He has lost all hope that he will be able to lead you astray in big things so beware of following him in small things."

"O People! No prophet or messenger will come after me, and no new faith will be born. Reflect, therefore, O people, and understand the words which I convey to you. I leave

¹⁸ Bukhari 67/1: Muslim 16/6: Nasa'i 26/22

¹⁹ Tirmidhi 41/32, Abu Dawud 42/12, Ibn Majah 1/42, authenticated by al-Albani

²⁰ Bukhari 92/2

²¹ Bukhari 53/7; Muslim 30/23; Abu Dawud 42/11; ibn Majah 1/14

behind me two things, the Quran and the Sunnah, and if you follow these you will never go astray."²²

After the Prophet (عليه وسلم) completed his Final Sermon, on Arafah, the revelation came down:

...This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion...²³

Imam Malik said: "Whoever introduces a bid'ah (innovation) into Islam thinking that it is good is implying that Muhammad betrayed his mission, because Allah said: 'This day, I have perfected your religion for you.' So, whatever was not part of the religion on that day, can never be part of the religion today."²⁴

We see this exact attitude from the Companions and those who follow them exactly. While we may think of some bid'ah (innovations) as minor, in reality to change the religion in any way is a major offense against Allah. There is a very important story that we must reflect on and read carefully. In it you will see that every act of bid'ah (innovations) is counted as an evil deed, opening the doors to misguidance and at it's root direct opposition to the religion of Islam.

Amr ibn Salmah said, "We used to sit by the door of Abdullah ibn Masud before Fajr, so that when he came out we would walk with him to the masjid. One day Abu Musa al-Ashari came to us and said, 'Has Abu Abdurrahman (ibn Masud) come out yet?' We replied, 'No.' So he sat down with us until he came out. When he came out we all stood along with him, so Abu Musa said to him, 'O Abu Abdurrahman! I have just seen something in the masjid which I deemed to be evil, but all praise is for Allah, I did not see anything except good.' He enquired, 'Then what is it?' Abu Musa replied, 'If you live you will see it.

I saw in the masjid people sitting in circles awaiting the prayer. In each circle they had pebbles in their hands and a man would say, 'Repeat Allahu Akbar a hundred times.' So they would repeat it a hundred times. Then he would say, 'Say la ilaha illallah a hundred times.' So they would say it a hundred times. Then he would say, 'Say subhanallah a hundred times.' So they would say it a hundred times.' Ibn Masud asked, 'What did you say to them?' Abu Musa said, 'I did not say anything to them. Instead I waited to hear your view.' Ibn Masud replied, 'If only you had ordered them to count up the evil deeds they are acquiring and assured them that their good deeds would not be lost!'

Then we went along with him until they came to one of these circles and stood and said, 'What is this which I see you doing?' They replied, 'O Abu Abdurrahman! These are pebbles upon which we are counting takbir, tahlil and tasbih.' He said, 'Count up your evil deeds. I assure you that none of your good deeds will be lost. Woe to you, O Ummah of Muhammad! How quickly you go to destruction! These are the Companions of your Prophet who are widespread. There are his clothes which have not yet decayed and his bowl which is unbroken. By Him in Whose Hand is my soul! Either you are upon a religion better guided than the religion of Muhammad or you are opening the door of misguidance.' They said, 'O Abu Abdurrahman! By Allah, we only intended good.' He said, 'How many there are who intend good but do

²³ Surat al-Ma'idah. 5:3

²² Agreed upon

²⁴ Kitab al-I'tisam by Imam ash-Shatibi

not achieve it. Indeed Allah's Messenger said to us, "A people will recite the Qur'an but it will not pass beyond their throats." By Allah! I do not know, perhaps most of them are from you.' Then he left them."

Umar ibn Salmah (the sub-narrator) said, "We saw most of those people fighting against us on the day of Nahrawan, along with the Khawarij." The Prophet (مليه وسلم) said:

"Islam began as something strange and will go back to being strange, so glad tidings to the strangers.²⁶ For the strangers are those who correct what the people have corrupted from my Sunnah after me."²⁷

Ibn Abbas said: "Assisting a man from those who adhere to the Sunnah, calling others to it, and prohibiting bid'ah (innovation), are themselves in worship."²⁸

Abdullah ibn Umar said: "Every innovation is misguidance, even if the people regard it as good."29

Ubay ibn Ka'b said: "Adhere to the path of Allah and cling to the Sunnah, for anyone in the path of Allah according to the Sunnah, whose eyes swell up with tears out of piety when remembering Allah, the Most Merciful, will never be touched by the Hellfire. Surely a modest effort in the path of Allah and the Sunnah is better than a great effort in contradiction to them." ³⁰

Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman said, "Every act of worship which the Companions did not do, do not do it."31

Imam al-Awza'i said: "Be patient, restrict yourself to the Sunnah and do not go beyond the limits of the decisions of the Companions; hold their positions and avoid what they avoided, take the path of your righteous predecessors for verily what was sufficient for them is sufficient for you." 32

Imam Sufyan ath-Thawri said: "A declaration of faith is meaningless without deeds; declarations and deeds are meaningless without sincere intention; and declarations deeds and intentions meaningless unless they agree with the Sunnah." ³³

Imam Fudayl ibn Iyad said: "If you see one who innovates coming on the road, take another road. The good deeds of one who innovates are not taken up to Allah. And whoever helps one who innovates has helped to destroy Islam." He also said: "Allah will cause the deeds of who ever likes one who innovates in religion to be of no value and remove the light of Islam from his heart."

Remember that our purpose and intentions must be sincere, for every deed is judged only by it's intention ³⁴, without sincerity any deed will be wasted. To proceed in our quest for knowledge we must be sincere in seeking it and sincere in implementing it, seeking only the pleasure of Allah, and no one else.

³⁰ Talbis Iblis by Imam ibn al-Jawzi

²⁵ Ad-Darimi, 1/79

²⁶ Muslim 1/279-280; Ibn Majah 36/3987-3988; Tirmidhi 40/24

²⁷ Tirmidhi 40/25, authenticated by al-Albani

²⁸ Talbis Iblis by Imam ibn al-Jawzi

²⁹ Ad-Darimi

³¹ Abu Dawud

³² Talbis Iblis by Imam ibn al-Jawzi

³³ Talbis Iblis by Imam ibn al-Jawzi

³⁴ Bukhari 1/1, and numerous others

Ibn al-Mubarak said: "Nothing is better than seeking knowledge for Allah's sake. And Allah hates nothing as much as seeking knowledge for someone else's sake." 35

So make your intentions sincere to seek knowledge only for the sake of Allah, and to revive the Sunnah of the Prophet (ميلي الله) - regardless of who might oppose you. The Prophet (عليه وسلم) said:

"Whoever revives a Sunnah of mine, which people then act upon, will have a reward equivalent to that of those who act upon it, without that detracting from their reward in the slightest. And whoever introduces a bid'ah (innovation) that is acted upon, will have a burden of sins equivalent to that of those who act upon it, without that detracting from the burden of those who act upon it in the slightest." ³⁶

"Whoever revives my Sunnah then he has loved me. And whoever loved me, he shall be with me in Paradise."³⁷

"May Allah brighten (the face of) a person who hears a hadith from me and memorizes it to convey it to others; for perhaps a receptor of knowledge is more knowledgeable than a transmitter, and perhaps a transmitter (of knowledge), is not versed in knowledge." 38

"No one of you should belittle himself." They said: "O Messenger of Allah, how could anyone of us belittle himself?" He said: "If he sees something concerning which he should speak out for the sake of Allah but does not say anything. Allah will say to him on the Day of Resurrection: "What prevented you from speaking concerning such and such?" He will say: "Fear of the people." (Allah) will say: "Rather you should have feared Me." "39

Muadh ibn Jabal said: "Upon you is to seek knowledge; for seeking it for the sake of Allah is worship; and understanding it (increases) the Fear (of Allah); searching for it is (a type of) Jihad; teaching it to those who do not know it is a charity; revising it is (like doing) Tasbeeh (Glorification of Allah); Through knowledge, Allah is known and worshiped; and through it He is Glorified and singled out (in worship). Through knowledge Allah raises the status of the people and makes them leaders and scholars through whom others are guided and are aligned to their opinions."

Opposing the bid'ah (innovations) and reviving the Sunnah is one of the greatest ibadah (acts of worship) that we can do today where the problem has become so wide spread. The extreme danger of bid'ah (innovations) in our religion and how they are the cause of destruction, both of Islam and ourselves, is clear. The obligation of enjoining good and forbidding evil where ever we see it and the importance of reviving the Sunnah, are clear.

Some scholars related being too shy to correct the people in these matters as minor shirk for one fears the people more than Allah. If we see anything wrong in our families or communities we must first stop it

³⁵ Adab Shar'iyyah 2/127

³⁶ Ibn Majah 1/209, authenticated by al-Albani

³⁷ Tirmidhi 41/34

³⁸ Tirmidhi 41/12; Abu Dawud 26/20; Ibn Majah #4105; Ahmad 5/183; Darimi #229

³⁹ Ibn Majah 4008, graded da'if but the meaning is sahih.

⁴⁰ Majmoo` al-Fataawa (10/39) by Sheikh al-Islam ibn Taymiyah

with our hands, physically ending these incorrect practices. Then after the hands, or if unable to, then we must stop these practices with our tongues by telling the people and teaching them. We must fear Allah as much as we can and do our most to defend Islam against the innovations of Shaytan.

May Allah assist us with beneficial knowledge and the action of implementing it, ameen.